

QUESTION

How do you find a nursing identity within a family legacy?

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My earliest memories of family dinners include conversations shared by my parents about patient catheters or diseases, entertaining patient anecdotes, and the relationship between nurses and doctors. As I grew up, my two older sisters added their own stories from their clinical nursing experiences. My mother has a doctorate of nursing science, my father is physician board certified in internal medicine and geriatrics, and both of my older sisters are nurses pursuing graduate degrees. My family has never been one to talk about sports or business; we always talked health and disease. It is truly all I know. However, when I was making my college decisions and, more importantly, my future career choices, I was determined not to become a nurse. I knew that I had to be somewhere in the healthcare field—I looked into physical therapy, occupational therapy, and even nutrition/dietetics—but I did not want to be just another nurse in the family, nor did I want to be perceived as someone who was just following in my family's footsteps. I was going to be different.

Then, when I was 17, my grandfather became sick as his myasthenia gravis and Parkinson disease progressed after a stroke. I spent as much time as possible with him during his last few months and lived at his house with my family during his final week. He was on hospice care, but my family and I provided his around-the-clock care during that final week. That was possibly the hardest but most rewarding week of my life, and I learned about what a privilege it is to be with someone when they pass, as well as the complexities and importance of nursing care. I may have lost my grandfather, but that week was the first time I considered nursing as a possibility in my professional life.

I was thrilled when I was accepted into the School of Nursing at Saint Louis

University. However, early on, I questioned my decision to become a nurse as I tried to juggle truly learning the extensive nursing content, being a collegiate athlete, and adding a minor in public health, without having extensive clinical experiences in which to apply what I was learning. Clinical experiences were limited my first two years. There were times when I questioned if I had made the right career decision as I stood in hospital hallways for six hours during clinical rotations only to take two sets of vitals.

I was committed, though, and my next goal was to find an externship. I literally jumped up and down with excitement when I was accepted into the Student Nurse Externship program on the hematology/oncology floor at St. Louis Children's Hospital during the summer after my junior year. The program is a preceptorship for nursing students approaching their final year of school, with an emphasis placed on clinical skills and confidence building. The 10 weeks I spent with the amazing patients and their families, as well as my amazing preceptor, were the best of my life. Inspired by my preceptor, I finally felt as though I was a nurse, completing essential tasks and helping people. Although I was full of uncertainty after my junior year in college, I never once

doubted my decision to become a nurse that summer—I was exactly where I was meant to be. Walking out of the hospital on my last day was bittersweet; I was full of excitement knowing I had found my niche in the world, but also sad knowing I was leaving a floor of nurses, patients, and families who I had grown to deeply care about.

It may have taken a sorrowful time in my life to find the beauty, challenge, and privilege in nursing, but I am grateful for the journey of discovery of nursing, a heartening profession. I am proud to be a part of nursing now. The gift of an inspiring preceptor—or even that of an encouraging family member—can make all the difference and erase any doubts.

KEYWORDS

nursing education; training; decision making

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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RESOURCES

- **Association of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Nurses**

Organization supporting nurses in pediatric hematology and oncology
<http://aphon.org>

- **National Student Nurses' Association**

Organization helping nursing students in their professional development
www.nсна.org

- **Oncology Nursing Society**

Free student membership is available for full-time students working toward their RN degree.
www.ons.org/member-center/join-renew